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SUBJECT: BULGARIA: EXTREME NATIONALIST PARTY ENTERS
PARLIAMENT

Ref: (A) SOFIA 1134, (B) SOFIA 1217

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The extreme nationalist political group Ataka (Attack) won 8.7 percent of the vote in June's general election and became the fourth largest political party in the new parliament which commenced in Sofia July 11. If, as expected, the first three parties form a coalition government, this will make Ataka the largest single opposition party in parliament. The group is strongly anti-U.S. and anti-EU. Under the slogan "Let's Give Bulgaria Back to Bulgarians", it won 21 seats in the 240-seat parliament, ahead of all three parties on the fragmented center-right. Hardships of the post-communist transition led to much of the protest vote of over 300,000 Bulgarians. Ataka leader Volen Siderov, a well-known journalist, is openly anti-Semitic. His statements inciting hatred against the Turkish and Roma populations successfully exploited negative attitudes among some Bulgarians towards the ethnic minorities. However, many Ataka supporters seemed to be as excited about the prospect of a new, tough-talking, anti-politician as by the actual message. The surprise victory of this newly-formed group has shocked Bulgaria, a country with a reputation of ethnic tolerance. END SUMMARY

2. (U) National Union Ataka, set up in May, 2005, is a coalition of five marginal groups previously not represented in parliament:

- Siderov launched the Ataka political party in April 2005 "to stimulate Bulgaria's national dignity." Ataka does not yet have a grass-roots organization. Its web site features a map of Bulgaria covered with Turkish and Israeli flags as well as numerous anti-Semitic articles, articles inciting hatred against Bulgarian Roma and Turkish minorities, and articles denouncing the U.S., EU and NATO.

- Former security and defense officers fired by Ivan Kostov's center-right government launched the Union of Patriotic Forces and Reserve Officers "Zashtita" (Protection) in 1998. It also includes former Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) activists who disagree with the BSP reformist course.

- The Zora political circle are mostly communists with nationalist views and ties to the unreformed wing of the BSP. Zora's mouthpiece, Nova Zora newspaper, is strongly anti-US and promotes ties with Russia and the Orthodox Slav nations. Since the establishment of Ataka, the Nova Zora weekly has acted as its mouthpiece as well.

- The little known National Movement for Salvation of the Homeland and the Bulgarian National Patriotic Party.

3. (U) Ataka's platform is heavily xenophobic. Ethnic parties should be banned, as well as radio and television broadcasts in Turkish. Foreign citizens should be prohibited from buying land, and Bulgarian production, trade and banks should be in local hands. Ataka wants to revise major privatization deals and halt ties with the IMF and the World Bank. Bulgaria should renegotiate its accession treaty with the EU, quit NATO, and not allow foreign military bases on its territory. All business deals involving politicians should be investigated, and illegally acquired assets should be confiscated. Siderov said submission of a draft bill for immediate withdrawal of the Bulgarian contingent from Iraq is an early priority.

FOUNDERS AND FUNDERS: FORMER SECURITY OFFICERS

4. (SBU) Ataka's parliamentary group includes a significant number of former military and police officials, most of them members of Zashtita. The links of some of Ataka's members with the former state security services and unreformed elements of the BSP have fueled conspiracy theories about Ataka having been created by the BSP and people linked to the notorious 6th Political Directorate of the communist-era State Security Service. Despite the presence of many former state security officers in Ataka, these theories are not substantiated. Ataka relied predominantly on Zashtita's regional branches for its campaign, and received backing from local patriotic groups. Regional private security companies provided funding for Ataka's relatively inexpensive campaign. According to some sources, Overgaz Chief Sasho Donchev and Nove Holding owner Vassil Bozhkov, a.k.a., "the Skull," funded Ataka, as well as other parties, in the final stage of the campaign.

SIDEROV: PROGRESSIVE JOURNALIST TURNED EXTREMIST

15. (U) Born on April 19, 1956, in the town of Yambol, Volen Siderov studied photography in Sofia, and worked as a photographer at the National Museum of Literature. In 1989, he joined the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), which led post-communist changes in Bulgaria. In 1990, Siderov, who was perceived as a talented and progressive journalist, became editor-in-chief of the right-wing daily *Democratsia*,

the mouthpiece of the UDF. He was fired in 1992.

16. (U) Siderov has worked for some of Bulgaria's largest-circulation newspapers, most recently for *Monitor* daily, which is strongly anti-U.S. In 2000, he won an award from the Union of Bulgarian Journalists. Siderov, who likes to shock, posed naked for male magazine "Club M." In 2002-2003, Siderov published two books - "The Boomerang of Evil," and "Who Robbed Us, and How," in which he expressed strong anti-Semitic and anti-globalist views. His latest book, "Bulgarophobia," argues that Bulgarians are being subjected to genocide as part of a conspiracy inspired by the West and "the Zionists."

17. (SBU) In 2003, Siderov's extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic articles became too radical even for *Monitor*, which fired him. He hosts a TV show called *Ataka* on the private cable television channel SKAT, which he uses as a platform for his extremist views. Siderov unsuccessfully tried to get on the ticket of the National Movement for Simeon II ahead of the 2001 general elections. In 2003, he ran for mayor of Sofia on the ticket of a marginal agrarian party. Siderov, who is divorced, has a long-standing relationship with journalist Kapka Georgieva, whose son Dimitar Stoyanov is *Ataka*'s deputy leader. People who know Siderov describe him as an oversensitive man, craving to join the political elite which he so viciously attacks. Historians involved with issues of nationalism do not take him seriously and say he has turned to nationalism as a result of personal and professional disappointments. Siderov has not traveled to the U.S. and has never applied for a U.S. visa.

OTHER KEY FIGURES IN ATAKA

18. (U) Yordan Velichkov, the Chairman of *Zashtita*, worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 1970 and 1992. He graduated with a degree in law from Sofia University in 1962 and specialized in diplomatic relations at Moscow's Diplomatic Academy. Velichkov served in the U.S., Canada and Yugoslavia, and headed the Consular Relations Directorate. Prof. Peter Beron, *Zashtita* deputy chairman, is a prominent natural scientist who has served as director of the National Museum of Natural History since 1993. Beron briefly chaired the UDF in 1990, but was forced to quit following allegations of links with the communist secret services. Stela Bankova, a former teacher, entered Parliament on the NMSS ticket in 2001 but a year later defected to become independent. She was the only MP who voted against Bulgaria's EU accession treaty ratification last April. Dimitar Stoyanov, a 22-year-old law student at Sofia University and deputy leader of *Ataka*, is the son of Siderov's girlfriend, Kapka Georgieva, from her first marriage. He is openly anti-U.S. and anti-Semitic. Newspapers carried pictures of him giving the Nazi salute. Velichkov, Beron, Bankova and Stoyanov are all *Ataka* MPs.

ATAKA CONSOLIDATES PROTEST, RADICAL VOTE

19. (U) *Ataka* drew protest votes from across the political spectrum, receiving backing from people discontented with a political elite perceived as being detached from real life issues and from those who have suffered from the post-communist transition. It penetrated all age groups, and drew its support from pensioners, civil servants and workers. The plurality of *Ataka*'s supporters backed Simeon's movement in the 2001 vote, and now see *Ataka* as the new "political miracle." Siderov's aggressive style appeals to people who blame the mainstream parties for a sharp decline in their living standard, and look to a strong, new figure to lead them out of their economic and social problems. *Ataka* also attracted many who did not vote in the previous elections.

110. (U) *Ataka* successfully tapped Bulgarians' negative attitudes towards the Roma following recent violent incidents between the two groups. The increased influence of the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) party in the government, which has grown disproportionately to its political representation, has also led some Bulgarians to back *Ataka*. In addition, staunch communists, who formerly supported the BSP, no longer feel represented by the reforming Socialists who back membership in the EU and NATO. *Ataka* also consolidated the votes of numerous marginal patriotic, extremist and radical groups.

11. (U) All parliamentary parties have declared they will not collaborate with Ataka in the new parliament, and all coalition scenarios exclude the group's participation in the government (Ref. A, B). President Georgi Purvanov blasted Ataka's extremist statements. BSP leader Sergey Stanishev said Ataka's extreme nationalism was "categorically unacceptable." The Ambassador has announced a policy of no

embassy contact with Ataka.

12. (SBU) COMMENT: For mainstream Bulgarians who think of themselves as tolerant, Ataka came out of nowhere in the last month of the campaign to win a surprising 21 seats in the Parliament. At this point, most see Ataka as a fringe element which will quickly fade from prominence. Ataka's emergence also is unsettling for Bulgaria's anxiety over its EU membership timetable. Ataka is a motley group within which Siderov is perhaps the most extreme -- and certainly the loudest -- voice. It is not clear to what extent Ataka MPs share his radical views, or whether they just used the popularity of his group to enter parliament. Some analysts say Ataka may soon face defections or a split. Its leaders are likely to tone down at least their anti-Semitic and racist rhetoric as they enter parliament. Nevertheless, Ataka's presence in parliament is an unfortunate outcome given Bulgaria's tradition of ethnic tolerance, and will tarnish the EU aspirant's image abroad. END COMMENT.

13. ATAKA VOTER PROFILE, MBMD exit poll, June 25, 2005.

GenderMale: 57.7%, Female: 42.3%

Age 18-29: 18.2%, 30-39: 19.5%, 40-49: 19.2%
.2%
50-59: 21.5%, Over 60: 21.6%

Education: Univ. 38.8%, High school 54.2%, Elementary 7.1%

Social group

Employer: 9.3%Mid-level manager: 5.4%
Civil servant 19.9%Worker: 24.7%
Student: 7.8%Unemployed: 6.8%
Housewife: 1.7%Pensioner: 24.4%

Who they voted for in 2001 general election

National Movement for Simeon II (NMSS) 34.9%
Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)13.1%
Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)11.3%
Other 20.3%
Did not vote20.3%

14. Detailed memo available at Department's Bulgaria desk.

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